

C. P. E. Bach's "Essay": An Introduction

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C. P. E. BACH'S *ESSAY*

AN INTRODUCTION¹

By WILLIAM J. MITCHELL

SOON after Emanuel Bach's death on December 14, 1788, plans were formed to erect a commemorative monument in the *Michaeliskirche* in Hamburg. To this project, which did not mature, the renowned poet and Bach admirer, Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock, contributed an epitaph:

Tarry not, imitators,
For you must blush if you remain.
Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach,
Profoundest harmonist,
United novelty and beauty;
Was great
In text-led strains
But greater yet
In bold, wordless music;
Surpassed the inventor of keyed instruments,
For he raised the art of performance
Through teaching
And practice
To its perfection.

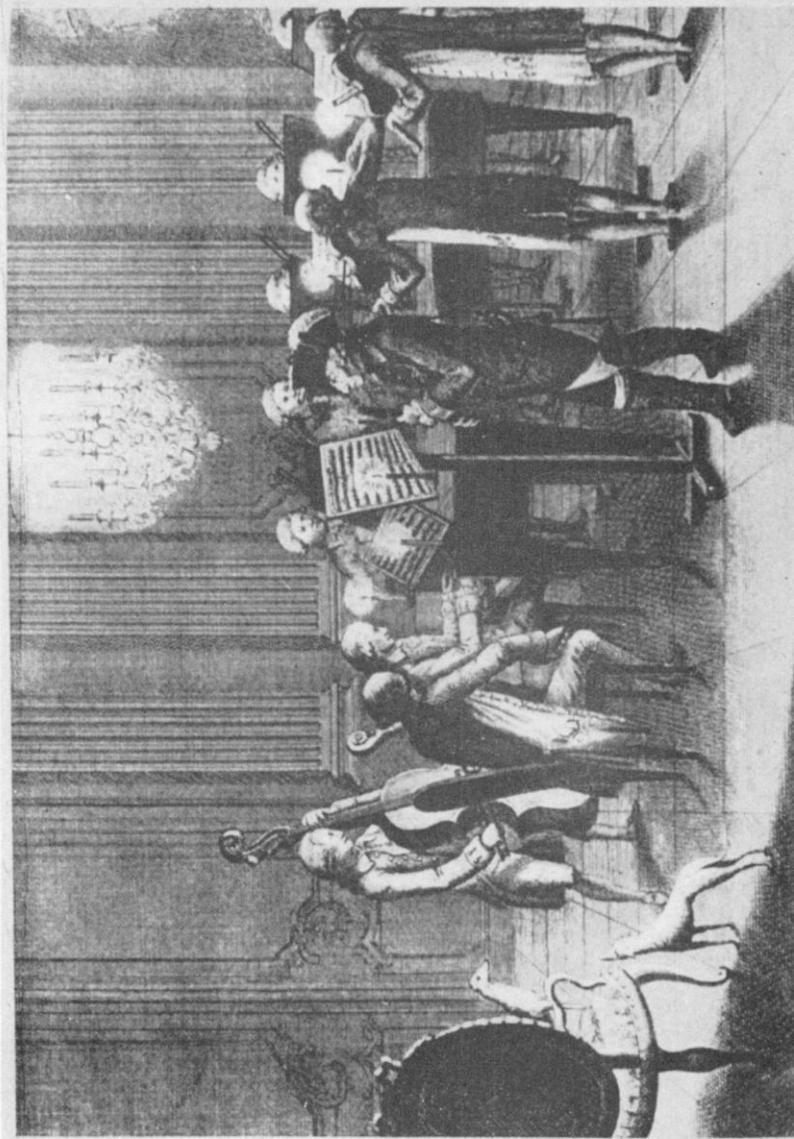
Something less than inspired, it has value as a catalogue of Bach's principal activities, and as a summary of the basis of his fame in the minds of his contemporaries. Our chief concern here is with the Bach who "raised the art of performance, through teaching and practice, to its perfection".

The most famous pupil of Bach was his youngest brother, Johann Christian, who studied with him during the four years he spent in Berlin after his father's death. Another was the widely known Czech pianist, Jan Ladislav Dussek, who spent about a year at Hamburg in 1783 with Bach, after having already come into prominence. He was praised by both Haydn and Mendelssohn, and described in W. J. Tomaschek's Autobiography as being "the first pianist who placed his instrument sideways on the platform, in which our piano-forte heroes now all follow him, though they have no very interest-

¹ This paper represents the introductory chapter to a complete English translation of Bach's *Versuch über die wahre Art das Clavier zu spielen*, to be published soon.—Ed.



KARL PHILIPP EMANUEL
BACH.



Friedrich der Große

Frederick the Great with his musicians

ing profile to exhibit". It is doubtful that he learned this as any essential part of his study with Bach.

Other pupils were less well known, such as Nikolaus Joseph Hüllmandel, the Königsberg organist Carl Gottlieb Richter, Friedrich Wilhelm Rust, and Carl Fasch, who alternated with and later succeeded Bach as accompanist to Frederick the Great, after being coached in the musical idiosyncrasies of the flute-playing monarch. For the rest, a good deal of Bach's teaching was directed to the amateurs in whom he had an enduring interest.

But it would be a gross injustice to both him and his pupils to limit Bach's influence solely to those who studied directly with him. His fame as the founder of a school was achieved much more significantly through the agency of his music and the *Essay*. The latter was called by Haydn "the school of all schools". And Mozart, Beethoven, and Clementi added their endorsements, speaking uniformly of Bach as one whose music must be studied, not simply played. Beethoven, after hearing the young Czerny perform in 1801, turned to the father and said, "The boy has talent; I shall take him as my own student and teach him. Send him to me once a week. Be sure to procure Emanuel Bach's instruction book on the *True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments*, so that he may bring it to his next lesson." Czerny goes on to relate that Beethoven's method followed the *Essay* closely and included the playing of the *Probestücke*. All of these men, especially Haydn, who discovered Bach early in life and never forgot him, can be called his pupils in this broader sense of the term.

The *Essay* became famous as an instruction book almost immediately and reached many students throughout the latter half of the 18th century. No record is available of the number of copies that were printed, but an idea of the rate of its distribution can be gained by consulting a letter that Bach wrote to Engelhardt Benjamin Schwicker, April 10, 1780. In it he expressed his willingness to turn over control of the work to this Leipzig publisher. He wrote in part: "I can now say with certainty that I still possess 260 copies of Part One and 564 of Part Two." For these 824 copies, with the examples to Part One and manuscript revisions to the entire book, Bach asked and evidently received 180 Louis d'or. To dispel any false notion that the matter was urgent, Bach added shrewdly, "I am no more obliged to sell than you are to buy." The transaction was completed.

The 824 copies, some going back 21 years, others 18, must rep-

resent only the lesser part of the total printed in 1753, 1759, and 1762. But more information is provided by the fact that Schwickert, who most certainly was not inclined to destroy merchandise on which Bach placed a retail price of 3 thalers an item, reissued the *Essay* in 1780 by simply altering the title page of the acquired copies to make room for the name of the new publisher. The title page of this so-called "Third Edition" retained the revealing "Zweite Auflage" of the edition of 1759.

The 260 copies of Part One must have been largely sold by 1787, when Schwickert issued the revised edition, and the 564 copies of Part Two were not exhausted until 1797, when it reappeared in revision. This represents a yearly average sale of between 30 and 40 copies for each part, which, if extended backward to the original years of publication, would suggest that up to the appearance of the revisions between 1000 and 1500 copies of each part had been printed and sold. A modern publisher would sniff disdainfully at such paltry figures, but it should be kept in mind that the reading public in the 18th century was far smaller than it is today. Also, methods of printing and distribution were extremely modest. The publisher, Göschen, later (1787-90) printed 2000 copies of Goethe's *Werke*, but could find no more than 602 subscribers to the series. And sales of the individual volumes were even smaller. The Jena *Litteratur Zeitung*, a very popular and widely read journal of the time, achieved its success on issues of 2000 copies, according to a letter written by Göschen to Wieland. For a work like the *Essay*, designed for a very limited public, to reach our suggested, conservatively estimated number of copies, is indeed impressive, when compared with these other figures. It must also be remembered that the copying and borrowing of books were widespread practices at this time. Hence 1000 to 1500 copies served many more than the equivalent number of readers.

Other indications of the spread of Bach's *Essay*, but with totally unsatisfactory results, are found in an open letter of protest that the author published in the *Hamburger unpartheiischer Correspondent*, 1773, No. 7. Dated January 11, 1773, it runs in part:

I have observed with greatest satisfaction the change that has come over the world of keyboard playing since the publication of my *Essay*. I can assert without boasting that since its appearance, teaching and playing have improved. And yet I must regret that my high motives have innocently given rise to old and even worse barbarisms. Vain and selfish addleheads are no longer satisfied with playing their own fabrications creditably and forcing them on their students.

No! They must seek immortality through authorship. As a result so many school and text books have appeared since my *Essay* that no end of them can be seen. I have been injured most by those that contain stolen passages both with and without acknowledgment. Plagiarizing is free to all and I have nothing to say against it. But it is most harmful to strip plagiarizations of their proper contexts, and explain or apply them incorrectly. Everyone knows the damage that can be done by an incorrect fingering, a wrong explanation and application of embellishments, a thoroughly bad chord. I can assert without anger, and in truth, that every instruction book that I have seen since the publication of my *Essay* (and I believe I have seen them all) is filled with errors. What I say can be proved if necessary.

However, the *Essay* in its uncorrupted form reached all parts of the Continent. "Sale of my works is chiefly in the North, in Russia, Livonia, Courland, Sweden, Denmark, Holstein, Hanover, Mecklenburg, in Lauenburg, and Lübeck . . .," wrote Bach in the letter to Schwickert. But it also made its way southward. Czerny, for one, procured his copy in Vienna. Thus the seed of the Bach influence was widely scattered. Some concept of the impact of his music and *Essay* on the 18th century can be gained from Mozart's famous sweeping statement, as quoted by Rochlitz: "He is the father, we are the children. Those of us who do anything right, learned it from him. Whoever does not own to this is a scoundrel."

The evidence that is provided by such testimony from many sources, and by the sale and spread of the *Essay*, makes it clear that Emanuel Bach's contributions were no small part of the forces that directed the leading musical activities of the time. It should not be necessary to seek for superficial thematic similarities between his works and others' in order to prove this. Mozart gave succinct expression to the relationship of the music of his generation to Bach's: "We can no longer do as he did; but the way in which he did it places him beyond all others." It takes a true student to make so profound an observation. Rochlitz, the source of this as well as the preceding statement, is not always dependable; but in this case he can be trusted, simply because he lacked the insight necessary for the formulation of so penetrating an observation.

It is not pointless to inquire after the teachers of this teacher. Dr. Charles Burney in his *Present State of Music* wrote of Bach: "How he formed his style, where he acquired all his taste and refinement, would be difficult to trace; he certainly neither inherited nor adopted them from his father . . ." But in his *History*, he asserts, "It appears from Hasse's operas, where Emanuel Bach acquired his fine vocal taste in composing lessons, so different from the dry and

laboured style of his father." Philipp Emanuel was indeed a great admirer of *Il caro Sassone*, as the Italians called that favored composer of operas, but it is certain that the *Essay* owes much to Johann Sebastian. "In composition and keyboard performance, I have never had any teacher but my father," we are told in the Autobiography. Repeatedly in the *Essay* he mentions his indebtedness to his father.

But a large part of the practical wisdom contained in it must have been gathered during the years that he spent at the court in Berlin. Engaged informally in 1738 by Frederick, the crown prince, he was appointed to his position as chamber cembalist on the new king's accession in 1740. We read in Emanuel's Autobiography: "I . . . had the honor to accompany alone at the harpsichord the first flute solo that he played as king at Charlottenburg."

Bach absorbed much through his duties at the court. His presence was required almost daily, for he played the accompaniments at the king's private concerts. These chamber concerts were held from 7 to 9 P.M. except on Mondays and Fridays, when Frederick the Great attended the opera. Punctuality was the king's rule in all affairs, hence the musicians found it advisable to be assembled before the required time. Precisely at 7 he would appear and sound the pitch. Earlier, the waiting musicians could hear him rehearsing the more challenging passages of the evening.

There was not much variety over the years. Usually the main fare consisted of about six concertos played by the monarch. Later this number was reduced to three or four. Most of these were composed by Johann Joachim Quantz, flute virtuoso, whose playing first aroused the young Frederick's interest in that instrument. Frederick had received flute lessons from Quantz regularly since 1727, and the teacher wrote approximately 300 concertos for the exclusive use of the king. Occasionally, Frederick played one of his own works. Quantz and other instrumentalists played too, their performances being varied with arias sung by the court singers.

Emanuel Bach's music was not popular at the court. Burney, after his visit of 1773, wrote: "The compositions of the two Grauns and of Quantz, have been in favour with his Prussian majesty for more than forty years . . ." And later: "It must be owned that many of the passages, in these pieces of M. Quantz are now become old and common; but this does not prove their deficiency in novelty, when they were first composed, as some of them have been made more than forty years."

Burney gives us an intimate picture of one of the private concerts:

M. Quantz bore no other part in the performance of the concertos tonight, than to give the time with the motion of his hand, at the beginning of each movement, except now and then to cry out *bravo!* to his royal scholar, at the end of solo parts and closes; which seems to be a privilege allowed no other musician of the band. The cadences which his majesty made were good, but very long and studied. It is easy to discover that these concertos were composed at a time when he did not so frequently require an opportunity of breathing as at present; for in some of the divisions, which were very long and difficult, as well as in the closes, he was obliged to take his breath, contrary to rule, before the passages were finished.

There is no strong reason to believe that this concert which Burney attended after Bach's departure for Hamburg was very different, except in unimportant details, from earlier ones.

From other contemporaries, chiefly Johann Friedrich Reichardt and Carl Fasch, Bach's alternate at the harpsichord and later *Kapellmeister*, we win more information. Fasch asserted that the king, along with Bach and Franz Benda, was a great artist in adagio playing, but that his rhythmic sense was not always dependable, especially in rapid passages. As monarch he retained and exercised the right to bring the ensemble into agreement with his wayward tempos by beating time forcefully. A story goes that a royal admirer on one such occasion exulted, "What rhythm!" To which Bach replied dryly, "What rhythms!" The fruits of these daily experiences appear throughout the *Essay*. They can be found in the many details of practical advice that Bach gives to his reader.

These two sources of Bach's artistic education, his father's instruction and the execution of his duties in the service of the king, were supplemented by a third, his association with many of the leading musical figures of his day. At the court were two of the brothers Graun: Carl Heinrich, music director and celebrated composer of *The Death of Jesus*, and Johann Gottlieb, conductor of the royal orchestra, composer, and eminent violinist. Quantz, already mentioned, was present as chamber musician. His *Versuch einer Anweisung die Flöte traversiere zu spielen* (Berlin, 1752) was a spur to Bach. Five members of the Benda family played at the court, including Franz and, for a shorter time, Georg. Johann Friedrich Agricola, too, was there as court composer, "more corpulent than Jomelli, or than his relation Handel", according to Burney, who visited him later.

In Berlin was also the quarrelsome Johann Philipp Kirnberger,

like Agricola a student of Johann Sebastian Bach. Engaged as violinist in the court from 1751, he left to become musical director to the Princess Amalie in 1758. He wrote several important theoretical works and contributed many of the musical articles to J. G. Sulzer's *Allgemeine Theorie der schönen Künste* (Berlin, first edition 1771-74), the remainder being written by his pupil Johann Abraham Peter Schulz. On adding the name of Friedrich Wilhelm Marpurg to this roster we have reassembled the group of writers who made Berlin the hub of musical theory. Burney in the *Present State of Music* writes of Berlin:

I was impatient to begin my musical inquiries in a place . . . where both the theory and practise of music had been more profoundly treated than elsewhere, by professors of great and acknowledged abilities, who are still living; and who have published the result of their long experience and superior skill in treatises which are regarded throughout Germany as classical.

He proceeds to enumerate, not without errors, writings by Quantz, Bach, Agricola, Marpurg, Kirnberger, and Sulzer.

With the exception of Quantz's *Versuch* and two publications by Marpurg, all of the writings of these men appeared after Bach's *Essay*. Its influence is apparent in many of them, just as it is in still later works such as Türk's *Clavierschule* (1789) or Milchmeyer's *Die wahre Art das Pianoforte zu spielen* (1797). But traffic in ideas ran in two directions; Bach met his associates frequently and exchanged opinions with them. In his Autobiography he wrote: "My Prussian duties never left me enough time to travel in foreign countries. . . . This lack . . . would have been harmful to anyone in my profession, had I not had the good fortune from my youth on to hear at close range the finest of all kinds of music and to meet masters of the first rank, many of whom became my friends." Bach absorbed much from these friendships, the results of which, carefully evaluated and recast, appear throughout the *Essay*. Most easy to discover are those points on which he and his contemporaries disagreed. Although he rarely mentions anyone by name, it is clear that he and Quantz were divided on several matters.

In order to complete our sketch of the *Essay*'s background we must direct our attention to Bach's abiding interest in the proper instruction of the musical novice. A great deal of his music was written for teaching purposes. The title of his best-known keyboard works, the collections for Connoisseurs and Amateurs, indicates the spread of his interests. In addition the Sonatas with varied reprises

and the pieces published in Marpurg's and others' collections were designed for the non-professional musician. It is true that the *Essay* was written for the student whose aim was complete mastery of the keyboard. But the Introductions to both parts show clearly that Bach was well aware of the general state of musical instruction, indeed that he wrote with it in mind. Especially is this true of the Introduction to Part One, where he writes caustically of the pretentiousness of the average teacher, his abysmal ignorance and unmusicality.

A few contemporary documents give us information on keyboard instruction at the time. The first, a continuation of the open letter that has already been quoted, states Bach's views on teaching the serious and the casual student:

Those who assert that my *Essay* is too long, say nothing and at the same time reveal their gross ignorance. I divide all keyboard performers into two groups. In the first are those for whom music is a goal, and in the second, all amateurs who seek thorough instruction. My *Essay* is intended for the first group; no paragraph is superfluous. In fact it will be seen from the supplements soon to appear that far from having said too much, I have not yet said enough. Teachers must know everything that appears in my *Essay* and be clever enough to select the manner and order of instruction best adapted to the students that they teach. Niceties come last, as expressed in one of my Introductions.

Nothing fundamental can be learned without time and patience. Study of keyboard performance is not a compendious affair, and dare not be if it is to be learned thoroughly. What is there to say about those false instruction books which in their alleged brevity are almost as long as mine?

For the second group, the amateurs, there is indeed no instruction book, if this could once be impressed upon their teachers. Instead, one should proceed as I used to, unwillingly but out of necessity. Before each period, I wrote out the lesson that I intended to give and concerned myself only with the most essential principles. Niceties of, and proper contexts for, embellishments, refinements of accompaniment, the divided accompaniment, etc. had to be omitted; they were not needed. Throughout, the student was not allowed to commit a single error like those that are accepted as postulates in many books. If the student was prepared, it turned out that the entire transcribed lesson (without examples and the rudiments, which were presupposed since they can be taught as well by a village schoolmaster as by the greatest artist) filled about a half sheet of paper.

Hence, for purposes of thorough instruction the abridging of a keyboard handbook, even when it is done without errors, clearly does more harm than good. All of the compendium writers that I know have written, in certain respects, too little, in others, too much, but in all respects, masses of errors. What miserable nonsense can be found in some! And this is the reason: to judge from their books, the authors have never studied composition, which they must by all means know in order to construct an accompaniment. This study is not merely of the rules of composition; it bears directly on an understanding of composition. In a word no one can put his trust in a keyboard instruction book, if the author has not previously made himself known and proved himself worthy to be considered an accomplished composer through his good compositions.

In *Der Critische Musicus an der Spree*, the weekly that Marpurg published in 1749, there are two more letters, satiric in nature and probably written by the publisher, that refer to keyboard playing and instruction. These give us more information than is revealed in many textbooks of the time. The first, attributed to an anonymous young lady, appeared in the issue of March 11, 1749. It runs, in part:

My dear Papa acquired an excellent instrument at an auction for 15 groschen and 6 pfennige. I am instructed on it by a very clever country organist from a nearby town. We let him visit us at his convenience every two weeks, and on each trip he gives me a half-hour lesson. He is not expensive; we pay him roughly 2 or 3 ducats a month, and each year my dear Mama gives him a bushel of oats. Even if I had no interest in music, this man would be the one to create it. He is quite unassuming, but for a man of common blood he knows very well how to get along with people. He always sits on my left when I play and never forgets to bow with a few light steps after each lesson. In order to relieve my mind of unnecessary bother he marks all notes with letters, although I am already beginning to recognize the c-clef on the first and other lines. He can not bear the g-clef. It was introduced abortively, he says, by musical free-thinkers, and his teacher's grandfather was their sworn enemy. He considers fingering a small matter which he leaves to my discretion, although he insists on banishing the thumb, and often expresses annoyance at those who make so much use of it. Because he has no interest in ornaments and does not want to delay my progress for two or three years, he disregards all of them, asserting that they hamper rapid playing. Also, he assures me that I shall soon begin to play the latest arias, since I already have under my fingers about a half dozen chorales, in addition to the Smithy's Courante, some popular songs, and two Polish dances. So I am prepared for more difficult pieces. I must not forget to tell you that my resourceful master carries with him a Jew's harp or a pipe with which he often accompanies me so that, as he expresses it, he can give me a few ideas about concertos.

The second letter appeared in the issue of May 13, 1749, and is signed, Musenhold. The body of it describes a projected method of financing an orchestra in a small town by means of contributions and the novel imposition of fines for such transgressions as a lady's premature wearing of a new coiffure or a husband's withholding of a small service from his spouse. The correspondent proceeds to describe the sorry personnel of the incumbent orchestra and concludes as follows:

Bamboozler, our keyboardist, has fine hands. But he is unable to put them to good use except when the governess, hired by the mother, excuses herself for a moment, leaving him alone with his young lady students. The mechanics of fingering are completely unknown to him. In right-hand trills, he uses only the second and third fingers, refusing to allow the third and fourth to play on any account. In playing three-part chords in the right hand in which the lowest tones lie a fourth apart and the upper a third (par ex. *d, g, b*) he uses the second, third, and fifth fingers, even though the middle tone must be played by

the fourth. And so, from the beginning, he ruins his students' hands. Also, he is so bad at thorough-bass that he knows neither the tones nor the tonality of the chord of the augmented second. In accompanying he is like the lowliest chorale player; he leaps all over the keyboard from one octave to another with his right hand, as if the identity of chords were known to him only here and there. And another proof that he knows nothing about harmony: not only does he play all mistakes from poor copies of arias, he transcribes them note for note in his students' copy books.

If Bach was unacquainted with these two letters, published in Berlin by a musician who was well known to him, it made little difference, for this famous son and pupil of "old Bach of Leipzig", as Marpurg called him, this celebrated keyboard player who knew and practiced at its best the music of Berlin, who knew many of the cognate musicians of his time, was also conversant with the common day-to-day practices. The content of the *Essay* provides us with direct evidence, for the discussions that it contains run from the finest and subtlest topics to the broadest and most basic. If it disagrees with Quantz, or echoes Couperin, it also lashes the local pedantic music masters.

The *Essay* is first and foremost a practical book that was designed less for discussion than for instruction. Its ancestry runs back through works like Mattheson's *General Bass Schule*, Heinichen's *General Bass*, to Niedt's *Musicalische Handleitung*, the text on which his father's teaching was based. Also in the background is François Couperin's *L'Art de toucher le Clavecin*. There is no trace of the speculative temper of the Age of Reason that brought forth Lessing's *Laokoon*, Sulzer's *Allgemeine Theorie . . .*, or earlier, Charles Batteux's *Les Beaux-Arts reduits à une même principe*. For works that pronounced first principles and the governing laws of esthetics, Bach had only the practitioner's scorn. "They dispense their alms with a completely unhappy arbitrariness," he writes in the *Essay*.

Primarily the book seeks clarification and improvement of the keyboardist's lot through a painstaking ordering and exposition of the several factors that relate to the practice of his art. The author's qualifications were eminently suited to the requirements. Of his practical experience and wisdom, we already know. His contemporaries set the highest store on his expressive playing. As a composer he was the leading exponent of the *Empfindsamkeit*, the German counterpart of the *style galant*. Beyond this he had an enduring interest in all music, as well as highly developed critical faculties. In his Autobiography he wrote:

It is because I have never liked excessive uniformity in composition or taste, because I have heard many different kinds of good things, because it has always been my opinion that the good should be accepted regardless of where it may be found, even when it appears in small details of a piece; it is because of these considerations and the assistance provided by a God-given natural ability that the variety which is attributed to my compositions has arisen.

Another important qualification: he was a collector by nature. In his estate were over 300 portraits of famous men, mostly musicians, which he had gathered together over the years. Many of these hung in his home in Hamburg, where Burney saw and remarked on them. And without his careful preservation of many of his father's scores, our knowledge of the Leipzig Bach's music would be far poorer. Wide musical experience, catholic tastes and interests, discrimination, the collector's habits of acquisitiveness, all of these factors contribute to the value of the *Essay* and lend to it a unique quality. But, finally, there can be found on more than one page a sly, sometimes a caustic, wit. Johann Friedrich Doles, a school companion and one of Johann Sebastian's successors at the Thomasschule, once said, "Like many boys of active mind and body, he was afflicted from childhood on with the malady of the roguish tease." Symptomatic are his remarks on local teachers, Italian accompanists, the performance of incompletely marked scores.

Nowhere is Philipp Emanuel's indebtedness to his father more clearly expressed than in the chapter on fingering. The son worked out the details, but the father fixed the basic principles. However, it is clear from the reference to fingering as "a secret art, known and practiced by very few", that the Bach family did not discover it, but rather organized and elaborated its technique. Other facts can be adduced to support this view.

Of the older fingering, it can be said that it lacked systematization. It was conditioned by earlier musical styles and was characterized in general by a sparing use of the thumb and fifth finger with a consequent favoring of the middle fingers. For example, in running passages the right hand often ascended and the left hand descended by repeatedly crossing the third finger over the fourth. As the right hand descended the third finger repeatedly crossed the second. The thumb came into repeated use only in wide stretches and as the left hand ascended, a common fingering being, 4,3,2,1,2,1,2,1. The differences from one school to another lay essentially in the amount of use allotted to the extreme fingers. In Girolamo Diruta's *Il Transilvano* (1593?, 1597) these hapless members are almost completely

banished. More kindly disposed towards them were the English virginalists and the Germans such as Elias Nicolaus Ammerbach, in whose *Ein New Kunstlich Tabulaturbuch* (1575) the fourth finger of the left hand crosses the thumb in stepwise ascent. In François Couperin's *L'Art de toucher le Clavecin* (1716, 1717) the thumb is employed frequently in wide stretches, and in running passages for the left hand, but in the right no more frequently than others had used it. Characteristic for the French school at this time is the replacement of one finger by another on an unrepeated, held tone, along with direct repetitions of a single finger in running passages. A palpable misprint accounts for the claim that *L'Art de toucher . . . foreshadows the newer fingering.*

A very important innovation of the new method was the turning under of the thumb in running and arpeggiated passages. The older fingering made use of the thumb in large stretches and runs, but in the latter its sole function was to strike the key and remain inactive while the second or rarely the third and fourth vaulted it. This critical element of the Bach fingering must have been known and employed by Domenico Scarlatti, for one, for the virtuoso passages in his sonatas could hardly have been delivered satisfactorily without it. For corroborative evidence we can call on Franz Anton Maichelbeck, in whose *Die auf dem Clavier lehrende Caecilia* (Augsburg, 1738) the turned thumb is called for repeatedly. This fact is of special interest here, for Maichelbeck's own keyboard works incorporate many of the bravura elements of the Scarlatti sonatas.

Further, Marpurg's *Die Kunst das Clavier zu spielen* (1750/51) employs the turned thumb as a basic technique in the performance of scales. It is quite possible, however, that Emanuel Bach had a part in the working out of this feature of Marpurg's short treatise. Certainly Marpurg did not hesitate to pick plums from the *Essay* once it had appeared.

If, then, the new fingering was known to some, it remained a closed book to the rank and file of teachers and students until Bach's systematic exposition appeared in 1753. Marpurg's satiric letters, quoted earlier, are clear enough proof of this, and also of the fact that the old fingering had outlasted its function. "Who does not know when a new epoch began for music in general, and for its most accurate and finest performance in particular . . .", wrote Bach in his Autobiography. The new style demanded a new delivery.

Bach's fingering is the foundation of modern technique. Of the

older methods but few details remain in his exhaustive exposition, such as the crossing of 3 over 4 in the ascending right hand, but this only as an alternative to the new method of turning the thumb. As keyboard style developed, as the pianoforte with its different action came into its own, certain extensions of technique were required. These were provided by Clementi, Czerny, J. B. Cramer, and many others. If Muzio Clementi is sometimes credited with introducing modern finger technique, we need only read his own acknowledgment of indebtedness to the *Essay* in order to restore the proper sequence: "Whatever I know about fingering and the new style, in short, whatever I understand of the pianoforte, I have learned from this book."

The most extended contemporary review of the *Essay* appeared in the *Bibliothek der schönen Wissenschaften und der freyen Künste* (Vol. 10, pts. 1,2, 1763/4). In it Bach's work is ranked as the equal of Quantz's *Versuch*, Leopold Mozart's *Violinschule*, and Agricola's translation with additions of Tosi's *Opinioni*. The review is laudatory on all counts save those that refer to the chapter on embellishments, where several exceptions are taken to Bach's treatment and organization of material. Whether these differences of opinion are entirely justified is less significant than the fact that they indicate that Bach did not, as indeed he could not, represent all practices of the 18th century. Taste and style are important factors in his treatment. Further, although Bach's ordering of his material is clear and logical, it is obvious that a somewhat different organization might have been undertaken. All in all, the chapter on embellishments contains a large but discerning selection of ornaments from all styles.

Ornamentation at the time of the *Essay* was of two kinds. There were first the optional elaborations which performers were expected to interpolate into the pieces they played. Ornamentation in this sense was a dying practice. Johann Sebastian Bach had already subscribed to the writing out of every note that was to be performed. Philipp Emanuel, following his father's practice, treats free elaboration only briefly, in connection with the performance of fermatas and cadenzas.

The second kind was the stereotyped short embellishments, the appoggiaturas, trills, turns, etc. To these, Bach directed his full attention. The task that he set for himself was a twofold one. First he classified each type and designated a distinctive sign, notation, or position for each subtype. For example, the section on the turn

includes the turn over a note, after a note, over a tie, over a dot, the trilled turn, the snapped turn, and the ascending turn. In all, he cites seven types and twenty-four subtypes of ornaments exclusive of slight variants. While the ends at which Bach arrived are, in certain instances, peculiar to his own judgment in these matters, the idea of sorting and classifying embellishments was not at all new, for this was the subject matter of many books and prefatory notes of the time and earlier. Much more original and provocative was the specifying of the exact musical context that was suited to each ornament. Here Bach attempted to assist the performer who must know where to insert unspecified ornaments. For, if the practice of providing free elaborations was approaching its end, the more modest one of inserting short embellishments was still a vigorous art. Certainly it met with Bach's approval, where the other did not.

The chapter on embellishments is a difficult, but an inescapable and rewarding assignment for the musician who would discharge creditably his responsibilities to 18th-century music. Generally speaking, Bach's contemporaries and later composers did not accept his advocacy of a separate designation for each ornament. Instead, they followed the practice of using a few signs to cover all cases, when they did not write out the ornament completely. Today we have come to believe that each of these signs represents a single, pat formula. The often gruesome results of this misapprehension can be heard from conservatory to concert hall. Bach's chapter is a primary, corrective, source work. In it we are provided with an opportunity to study in detail the exact manner in which these ornaments were performed by one of the most precise and sensitive artists of his period.

In the third chapter of the *Essay*, Bach writes of performance. On the evidence presented by his own keyboard music, it is doubtful that he possessed or sought the technical wizardry of Domenico Scarlatti. His fame derived from other sources. It was the heightened expressiveness of his playing, the daring originality of his music that impressed his listeners. Among those who heard him and remarked on his performance were the poet Klopstock, the musicians and musicographers Marpurg, Reichardt, and Burney. The last named wrote in his *Present State of Music*: "His performance today convinced me of what I had suggested before from his works; that he is not only one of the greatest composers that ever existed, for keyed instruments, but the best player in point of expression; for others,

perhaps, have had as rapid execution: however, he possesses every style; though he confines himself chiefly to the expressive." And the author, possibly Reichardt, of *Musikalischer Almanach, Alethi-nopel* (1782) writes similarly: "To know Bach completely one must hear the wealth of his imagination, the profound sentiment of his heart, his constant enthusiasm as he improvises on his Silbermann clavichord."

As the principal practitioner of the *Empfindsamkeit*, with its emphasis on the feelings, the "affections", with the clavichord as its best loved instrument, Bach made technical mastery of the keyboard only a contributory factor to the expressive end that he sought. Music here was far removed from a decorative art, from abstract patterns of sound; it was, above all else, a vehicle for the expression of the emotions. Music must languish, it must startle, it must be gay, it must move boldly from one sentiment to another; these were the requirements that had to be met by the composer. And the performer must understand the true content of each piece that he played. He must transmit accurately and faithfully its expressive nuances to an audience whose heart must be stirred. This was the core of the esthetic doctrine of the Berlin school. Its artistic parallels were the English sentimental novels and the romantic Germans of the literary movement that became known later as the *Sturm und Drang*.

Throughout the *Essay* Bach distinguishes between the learned and *galant* styles in music. He set no high store on the former, although he wrote his share of polyphonic pieces and had a deep admiration for his father's works. His predilection was for the *galant* style, French in derivation. Yet his own music and manner of performance were far different from the patterned forms, the restrained elegance and grace of the rococo. His manner of delivery, like his music, was replete with personal expressiveness, with song. This view is clearly expressed in his Autobiography: "My principal aim, especially of late, has been directed towards playing and composing as vocally as possible for the keyboard, despite its defective sustaining powers. This is no easy matter if the sound is not to be too thin or the noble simplicity of melody ruined by excessive noise."

"I believe that music must, first and foremost, stir the heart. This can not be achieved through mere rattling, drumming, or arpeggiation, at least not by me."

Thus in the chapter on performance the points stressed are those concerned with expressive playing, with correct interpretation. It

is only after attention has been directed to these matters, that Bach turns to such technical details as the notation and performance of detached and joined notes, the execution of the vibrato and portato, dotted notes, sustained and arpeggiated tones. And like the tempo rubato and dynamic shading, all of these matters are of importance only as they advance the first aim of the performer, to seek and interpret correctly the true expressive content of each piece that he performs.

To many it must seem strange that Philipp Emanuel, modernist and eclectic of the 18th century, did not employ the theories of Rameau, in writing the chapters on intervals and thorough-bass. He was not ignorant of the writings of the Clermont organist whose *Traité* had appeared forty years before Part Two of the *Essay*. Indeed, the *Essay* was written after the publication of all of Rameau's theoretical works.

Bach and his father were acquainted with this theory, which has become the basis of most of the modern writings on harmony, but they disagreed with it. This was made known in a letter to Kirnberger, cited in his *Kunst des reinen Satzes* (Pt. II, sect. 3, p. 188): "You may proclaim that my and my deceased father's basic principles are contrary to Rameau's." Extended consideration had been given by the members of the Bach school to the new theories of the fundamental bass, the suppositional root, the triad as the mother of all chords, and the seventh as the origin of all dissonances. This is apparent from the analyses in the Rameau manner which can be found, according to Spitta, in the definitive autographs of the Sarabande and two Menuets from Johann Sebastian Bach's D minor French Suite, and in Fischoff's autograph of the C minor Fugue and D minor Prelude of the *Well Tempered Clavier*. Later, Kirnberger analyzed the B minor Fugue of Book One and part of the A minor Prelude of Book Two with the avowed purpose of proving the superiority of his own analytic procedure over Rameau's. In only one respect can it be said that Philipp Emanuel made use of any of the new principles. He speaks several times of chord inversion. But this principle was known before the *Traité* was published, having made its appearance in Andreas Werckmeister's *Hodegus curiosus* (1687) and Godfrey Keller's *Rules* . . . (before 1700).

Bach's rejection of Rameau can be traced largely to the fact that the latter had pronounced a *theory*, whereas thorough-bass was essentially a *practice*. Certainly, as Bach presents his material, it is

apparent that the pervasive problems were first tactile and then artistic, but never speculative. Thus in organizing the chords of thorough-bass, Bach follows an older principle. Chords, regardless of their origin, are grouped according to the definitive interval that they contain. For example, all chords that contain sevenths are treated successively. They are the chord of the seventh, the seven-six, the seven-four, and the seven-four-two chords. Although only the first of these is a chord in the Rameau sense, all are chords in Bach's sense. Each of them must be recognized from its signature and played instantaneously. The student's task was to locate at the keyboard the definitive interval and then to bring under his fingers the various accompanying intervals. Identification of the root, real or supposed, did not aid him in his direct gauging of intervals above a given bass tone. Moreover, in thorough-bass some chords were closely associated, even though their roots were not identical. For example, above certain bass tones the six-three and six-four-three chords were regarded as interchangeable. Knowledge of the fact that these chords had different roots would have deterred rather than aided the student.

The greatest difficulty with the older system was caused by the great increase in the number and variety of chords that made their appearance in the course of the 18th century. Mattheson referred scornfully to the 32 posted by Heinichen, and listed 70, but overlooked six of the other's. Bach has 20, but includes many others as subtypes, chromatic variants, and alternates. It was this unwieldy bulk of chords that aided the spread of Rameau's system, but it is not pointless to note that the theory gained unquestioned acceptance only after the period of the basso continuo had passed. Bach's method, the one he inherited from his father, was the only effective introduction to the musical practices of his time.

The crucial difference between Rameau and Bach is most evident in those places where Philipp Emanuel explains the nature of chords. Where Rameau's emphasis rests on the vertical origins of a chord, Bach's rests on its behavior. Repeatedly he cites context, voice leading, rhythmic and melodic manipulation as the critical chord-shaping factors. Thus there are two kinds of six-four chords, those that retard a following five-three, and those that retard a following six-three. Where Rameau calls both identical because their roots are identical, Bach differentiates between them because their behavior is different. The first attempt to reconcile these two points

of view, harmonic function and behavior, was made by Kirnberger, whose works, despite certain obvious shortcomings, should be examined by all. He distinguishes between essential and inessential chords, and makes the root a determinative factor of a succession of chords rather than a single chord.

In general, the chapters on intervals and thorough-bass are concerned solely with the rudiments of accompaniment. Attention is directed to chord construction, doubling, and spacing. This was the groundwork that must be covered by every student accompanist. But it was hardly enough to make a skilled practitioner of the keyboardist. So, after treating the raw material, Bach turns in the chapter on accompaniment to refinements, stylistic matters, and special problems of settings, such as the treatment of appoggiaturas, passing tones, etc. He writes of the liberties that may be taken, of the amount of freedom from four-part accompaniment that may be indulged, of the ways in which a realization might be made into an active, essential part of a composition.

On only one final point is his thorough, detailed exposition less than adequate—he did not include a complete piece with a fully realized accompaniment. The examples themselves are highly informative and shed light on many particulars of construction, but they are, by nature, isolated fragments. While it would have been impossible to construct an accompaniment in which all problematic matters would find illustration, nevertheless a single complete movement would have clarified our concept of the total shape of an accompaniment, of its balances and parallelisms.

The extemporaneous realization of a figured bass is a dead art. We have left behind us the period of the basso continuo and with it all the unwritten law, the axioms, the things that were taken for granted; in a word, the spirit of the time. To become convinced of this one need merely play through the effulgent 19th-century Tone Poems that were added as accompaniments to 18th-century works; or the shy, halting harmony exercises that are prevalent in our own day. These latter reveal their timidity all the more clearly through their small notation. Both types, it should be remembered, were painfully and studiously wrought, but they fail completely to enter the creative milieu of the 18th century. To be sure there were bad, faltering accompaniments in the 18th century too. We can read about them here and elsewhere.

But it is illuminating to read first-hand accounts of the accom-

piments fashioned by one of the greatest improvisers of all time. Writing of Johann Sebastian Bach, Johann Friedrich Daube expressed himself as follows in 1756:

For the complete practice of thorough-bass it is necessary to know three species: the simple or common; the natural, or that which comes closest to the character of a melody or a piece; the intricate or compound.

The excellent Bach possessed this third species in the highest degree; when he played, the principal part had to shine. By his exceedingly adroit accompaniment he gave it life when it had none. He knew how to imitate it so cleverly with either the right hand or the left, and how to introduce an unexpected counter-theme against it, that the listener would have sworn that everything had been conscientiously written out. At the same time, the regular accompaniment was very little curtailed. In general his accompanying was like a *concertante* part most carefully constructed and added as a companion to the principal part so that at the appropriate time the upper voice would shine. This right was given at times even to the bass, without slighting the principal part. Suffice it to say that anyone who missed hearing him missed a great deal.

Lorenz Mizler also listened to Bach's accompaniments. He wrote in 1738:

Whoever wishes truly to observe what delicacy in thorough-bass and very good accompanying mean need only take the trouble to hear our Capellmeister Bach here, who accompanies every thorough-bass to a solo so that one thinks it is a piece of concerted music and as if the melody he plays in the right hand were written beforehand. I can give a living testimony of this since I have heard it myself.

Because thorough-bass realizations were created extemporaneously and served only an immediate purpose, there was no need to write them out. Nevertheless, a few have come down to us, some avowed realizations, others that partake so much of the nature of an accompaniment that they can be used to supplement Emanuel Bach's discussion. As listed here they range from the simple, through the natural, to the intricate, as classified by Daube:

Julius A. P. Spitta's *J. S. Bach* (Novello, 1899, III, 388 ff.) contains a realization by H. N. Gerber with corrections by Bach of a Sonata for Violin and Bass by T. Albinoni.

Georg Philip Telemann, *Singe- Spiel- und General Bass Uebungen*, ed. by Max Seiffert, Bärenreiter, 1935. This volume contains several songs with fully realized accompaniments. It was designed as an instruction book.

Musical Offering by J. S. Bach, prepared by H. T. David, G. Schirmer, 1944, p. 47 ff. This carefully edited work contains a realization by Kirnberger of the Andante from the Trio. The remaining movements of the Trio and mirror canon (p. 59 ff.) have accompaniments by an unknown student of the 18th century. His accompaniment of the settings are incorrectly attributed to Kirnberger (cf. H. T. David, *J. S. Bach's Musical Offering*, G. Schirmer, 1945, p. 99 ff.).

G. F. Händel, *Werke*, Vol. 48, p. 115, Adagio. The keyboard part is superscribed *cembalo concertato*, but is in the nature of an arpeggiated realization.

J. S. Bach, *Werke* II. 2, p. 97 ff., Aria, *Chi in amore*. This is the most complex of the accompaniments listed here, but even in its elaborated qualities it suggests an extemporaneous realization of the "intricate" kind. The keyboard part is superscribed, *cembalo obligato*.

F. T. Arnold, *The Art of Accompaniment from a Thorough Bass*, London, 1931, Ch. IV. This chapter contains suggestive, short, but complete examples from textbooks by Heinichen, Mattheson, and Geminiani.

An accompaniment from a thorough-bass demands more than a carefully gathered knowledge of 18th-century idioms. It requires in addition a highly creative imagination. When these two factors are present much of the elusive spirit of a good setting can be recaptured. As an example, Brahms' accompaniments to Handel's *Duetti e Terzetti* may be cited. They appear in Handel's *Werke*, Vol. 32, Nos. Ib and X to the end of the volume. Nos. XV-XX were published in Handel's *Duette*, Peters, No. 2070.

It is a rare privilege to be invited into a composer's workshop to look on as he fashions a model for us, as in the chapter on improvisation. Partial glimpses of the creator at work are provided in letters scattered through the centuries; and many rare vistas are opened up to the careful student of Beethoven's notebooks. But aside from these and the final chapter of the *Essay*, our only recourse is a vast desert of textbooks on the proper writing of inventions, academic fugues, sonatas, songs, etc. Their authors' compositions being at best of only minor significance, such books represent but secondary sources for those who wish to know intimately of the problems and processes of creation.

Burney in his *Present State of Music* describes Philipp Emanuel's improvising as follows: "After dinner, which was elegantly served, and cheerfully eaten, I prevailed upon him to sit down again to a clavichord, and he played with little intermission, till nearly eleven o'clock at night. During this time, he grew so animated and possessed, that he looked like one inspired. His eyes were fixed, his under lip fell, and drops of effervescence distilled from his countenance." Reichardt was bewitched by Bach's communicative improvisations.

Significant in Bach's exposition is the omnipresence of a ground plan, regardless of whether the subject of discussion is the short preliminary exercise, modulation, or the complete fantasia. The improvisatory character of this type of composition is achieved not by a meaningless wandering from key to key, but by an imaginative

manipulation of details that fit persuasively into a unified whole. But the relation between execution and plan is bold and free. Nowhere does the plan obtrude. Its function is to direct the general course of the work, and this it accomplishes by remaining quietly where it belongs, in the background. And when necessary it yields to a free twist of the foreground. Under the conditions set by Bach the sample piece could scarcely turn out to be one of his best works. His avowed purpose is to show the student how to construct a free fantasia. Limitations imposed by this aim were severe. Yet for all its circumscribed, unassuming modesty, it breathes the same atmosphere as the famous final piece of the *Probestücke*, also a free fantasia.

In this chapter, as in many parts of the chapter on thorough-bass, Bach presents himself as an analyst. His procedure is to discuss each inflection with relation to its normal behavior. It is instructive to compare such a method with the present practice of chord-naming which is passed off almost everywhere as analysis. Where the latter is mechanical and visual, Bach's approach is aural and artistic. Its requirements are keen perceptive powers, the ability to evaluate musical processes, and a long experience in the art. Bach had all of these qualities, and having them, he could never have regarded analysis as a search for chord roots and identification tags.

The *Essay* was Bach's only extended theoretical work. Except for it and certain illustrations that appeared in Marpurg's *Abhandlung von der Fuge*, there was only one paper that came to print, a Suggestion for the Constructing of Six Bars of Double Counterpoint in the Octave (*Einfall . . .*) which appeared in Marpurg's *Historisch-Critische Beyträge* (Vol. III, Pt. 2, p. 167 ff.). It is a work more ingenious than useful. Other writings, some of which were planned as supplements to the *Essay*, were concerned with thorough-bass, fingering, embellishments, modulation, and the free fantasia. They remained in manuscript (Wotquenne, Nos. 121, 256, 258). Whatever merits can be found in these other works, they contributed little to their author's renown. None worked as did the *Essay* to establish him as one who "raised the art of performance through teaching and practice to its perfection".